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ABSTRACT

In an effort to provide maximum support for the reading success of its students, a primary school in a rural, coal mining area simultaneously developed a family reading program and a sustained silent reading (SSR) program. The major objective of the family reading program was to encourage parents to read to their children for 15 minutes a day, seven days a week for a period of nine weeks. Sustained silent reading was scheduled in the classroom for 15 minutes every afternoon. To obtain data on the family reading program, questionnaires were designed to determine reading attitudes and habits for both the students and their parents. To evaluate SSR effects, three first grade students who participated in both programs were selected for case studies. One final method of evaluation for general reading improvement was the use of reading scores made by the students on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills. Results showed that more first and second grade students who participated in both programs considered reading their favorite subject, did more reading at home, and enjoyed silent reading than did the students who participated only in the SSR. Those students who participated in both programs also received higher reading achievement scores. There were some areas in which the students who participated in only the SSR program expressed more positive responses than the students who were in both programs. (HOD)

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The Effects of a Family Reading Program and SSR on Reading Achievement and Attitudes

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Introduction

Much attention has been devoted to the improvement of reading. As a result, educators continue to define areas which promote student reading success. A family pattern in which a parent or older sibling reads to a young child on a regular basis is one such characteristic (Durkin, 1966; Clark, 1976). Another is the Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) Program, which has as its primary objective the development of each student's ability in school to read silently without interruption for a relatively long period of time (McCracken, 1971).

In an effort to provide maximum support for the reading success of its pupils in this rural coal-mining area, the faculty of Sylvester Grade School, Boone County, West Virginia, decided to attempt a Family Reading Program and a Sustained Silent Reading Program simultaneously.

Procedure

The major objective of the Family Reading Program, as established by the West Virginia State Department of Education, was to encourage parents to read to their child for 15 minutes a day, seven days a week for a period of nine weeks beginning on February 18, 1980 and ending on April 21, 1980.

Parents were sent the necessary information explaining the program and encouraged to participate. Then those parents who decided to participate were given verification forms to be clipped, signed, and returned by the child to his/her teacher after the successful completion of each week of the program. Each teacher kept the forms for each child and then at the end of the nine-week period determined which children had successfully completed the program. Certificates were awarded to those completing the program by the Assistant Superintendent of Boone County Schools at the May P.T.A. meeting.

In order to obtain data on the Family Reading Program, questionnaires designed to determine reading attitudes and habits were devised for both the students and their parents. Before the program began and at the end of the program, teachers administered the same questionnaire to all their students. There were approximately 138 students enrolled in the school, which is made up of students in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. Data for evaluation were obtained from five classrooms, two first grades, two second grades, and one combined first and second grade, making a total of 81 students. To obtain data from parents, children participating in the Family Reading Program took a different questionnaire home to be completed by his/her parents at the start and end of the program. Forty-one parents completed the Family Reading Program. A second parent questionnaire was sent home six weeks after the program had ended to determine how many parents were still reading to their child and how many planned to continue over the summer.

The SSR program was scheduled in the afternoon for 15 uninterrupted minutes a day. The students could choose a library book, comic book, magazine, reading textbook, etc. The teacher was also to read during this time to provide the students with a good model.

To evaluate SSR effects, three first grade students who participated in both programs were selected for case studies. A good reader, an average reader, and a poor reader were determined, and a diary was kept on their reading habits during the school day.

One final method of evaluation for general reading improvement was the use of reading scores made by the students on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills. The test is required by the West Virginia State Department of Education and was administered one month after both programs were begun. The reading scores of those

students participating in the Family Reading Program were compared to those of students not participating in the Family Reading Program.

Summary

According to their answers on the 81 student questionnaires, the majority of the first and second graders like school and enjoy reading at home. Mothers are primarily responsible for reading to them at home. In addition to reading materials of their own at home, most children observe their parents read.

Twenty-two, first grade parents and nineteen, second grade parents completed the Family Reading Program. They agreed that their child likes school and considers reading his/her favorite subject. The children of both grades read to their parents as well as parents reading to them, yet more first grade parents had a certain time set aside for reading with their child than did the second grade parents. Parents of both grades said their children own books but there was an increase in the number of books owned by the students of both grades by the end of the program.

When discussing the benefits of participating in the Family Reading Program, first and second grade parents felt that it had brought them closer to their child as well as improving the child's reading ability and interest in reading. The questionnaire administered six weeks after the program had ended showed that first and second grade parents were still reading to their child and planned to continue doing so over the summer.

Comparisons were also made between the students who participated in both the Family Reading Program and the SSR Program with students who participated in only the SSR Program. The results showed that more first and second graders who participated in both programs consider reading their favorite subject, do more reading at home, and enjoy silent reading more than those students who participated in only the SSR Program. In the area of reading achievement, those students who participated in both reading programs achieved a higher score in reading on the Comprehensive Test

of Basic Skills than the students who participated in only the SSR Program, although the ranges of scores among the two groups were close. In the case studies, it was shown that all three students were able to increase their silent reading time by the end of the SSR Program. Occasionally two of the students brought in their own reading materials from home to use during the SSR time.

Responses given by students who participated in only the SSR Program were also evaluated to see which changes might have occurred. There was an increase in the number of first and second graders who consider themselves good readers, prefer silent reading to oral reading, and choose reading as their favorite subject. There were some areas in which the students who participated in only the SSR Program expressed more positive responses than the students who were in both programs. There were more first graders who participated in only the SSR Program who consider reading fun and think of themselves as good readers than the first graders who participated in both programs. And there were more second graders who participated in only the SSR Program who enjoy oral reading than the second graders who were in both programs.

Implications

By involving the parents in a Family Reading Program, reading becomes a part of the family's daily routine, with a closeness developing between the parents and their child. Parents can play an important role in the reading success of their child through their own example and by spending time reading to their child, listening to their child read to them, and providing their child with a wide variety of reading materials. Schools might seek such parental involvement through parent conferences, P.T.A. meetings, school newsletters and maintenance of a Family Reading Program as a regular part of the curriculum.

Hopefully a Family Reading Program establishes a pattern which also reaches the brothers and sisters of the children who participate as well. The importance of reading to children has no age limit. This practice of reading to children is an important way not only to prepare young children for school, but it also provides help for children already in school, especially if they have difficulty with reading. And because the parents of first graders tended to read to their child more than the parents of second graders, and because more parents of first graders completed the Family Reading Program than parents of second graders, schools need to emphasize the importance of interactive reading at home beyond the first grade.

A Sustained Silent Reading Program gives all children an opportunity to read silently at school every day and to select their own reading materials. Thus, those students who do not get any support for reading at home are exposed to the idea of reading as a pleasurable activity. From the comments made by students and teachers, the SSR Program was well-received and may be considered a worthwhile addition to the school curriculum.

Conclusion

Although this study did reveal many interesting effects of the Family Reading Program and the Sustained Silent Reading Program, more research is sorely needed. The importance of a school-related reading program with parental participation should not be underestimated, nor an in-school program which puts joy into reading. Reading belongs to everyone, and when the home and school work together to provide meaningful sustained experiences, then a child may have the most support possible for the successful acquisition of literacy.

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PUPIL QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME:_____

1. Do you like school?_____
2. Is reading your favorite subject?_____If not, what is?_____
3. Do you think reading is fun?_____
4. Do you like to read with your reading group?_____
5. Do you think you are a good reader?_____
6. Do you like to read out loud?_____
7. Do you like to read silently?_____
8. Do you read at home?_____
9. Do you read on week-ends?_____
10. Do you like to read every day?_____
11. Does your Mom read to you?_____
12. Does your Dad read to you?_____
13. Does your brother read to you?_____
14. Does your sister read to you?_____
15. Would you rather read than play?_____
16. Would you rather read than watch TV?_____
17. Do you have any books of your own at home?_____
18. Would you like to own books?_____
19. Would you be happy to get a book for your birthday?_____
20. Have you ever been to a library other than the one at school?_____
21. Would you like to go to a library?_____
22. Do you get any magazine subscriptions at home through the mail?_____
23. Do you get any magazines or comic books from the store?_____
24. Have you ever written a letter to anyone?_____
25. Have you ever signed a card such as a birthday card to anyone?_____
26. Have you ever written your own stories at home?_____
27. Do you see your parents read?_____

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

(First & Ninth Weeks)

Child's Name:_____

Parent's Signature:_____ Date:_____

1. Does your child like school?_____
2. What do you think is your child's favorite subject?_____
3. Does anybody read to your child at home? (ex. Grandparents, brothers, sisters, etc.)

   _____If so, how often?_____How long?_____
4. Do you read to your child?_____If so, how often?_____How long?_____
5. Do you have a certain time set aside to read to your child?_____
6. If your reading time with your child enjoyable?_____
7. Does your child read to you?_____If so, how often?_____How long?_____
8. Have you ever taken your child to a library to check out books?_____
9. Does your child own any books?_____If so, how many?_____
10. Does your child have any magazine subscriptions?_____If so, which magazines?_____
11. Do you own a set of encyclopedias?_____A dictionary?_____
12. Does your child see you read? (ex. newspaper, magazines, etc.)_____
13. Does your child see you write? (ex. letters, cards, notes, etc.)_____
14. Does your child ever write any stories, letters, or thank-you cards at home?_____
15. Does your child watch very much TV?_____If so, about how much?_____
16. If you decided to participate in the Family Reading Program, what do you expect to happen?

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

(Fifteenth Week)

Child's Name:_____

Parent's Signature:_____Date:_____

1. Does your child like school?_____
2. What do you think is your child's favorite subject?_____
3. Do you read to your child?_____If so, how often?_____How long?_____
4. Does anybody else read to your child?_____If so, how often?_____How long?_____
5. Do you have a certain time set aside to read to your child?_____
6. Has your reading time with your child been enjoyable?_____
7. Does your child read to you?_____If so, how often?_____How long?_____
8. Have you ever taken your child to a library to check out books?_____
9. Does your child own any books?_____If so, how many?_____
10. Does your child have any magazine subscriptions?_____If so, which magazines?_____
11. Do you own a set of encyclopedias?_____A dictionary?_____
12. Does your child see you read? (ex. newspaper, magazines, etc.)_____
13. Does your child see you write? (ex. letters, cards, notes, etc.)_____
14. Does your child ever write any stories, letters, or thank-you cards at home?_____
15. Does your child watch very much TV?_____If so, about how much?_____
16. Do you think your child's attitude toward reading has improved as a result of the Family Reading Program?_____
17. Do you plan to continue reading to your child on a regular basis even though the Family Reading Program is over?_____
18. What is your assessment of the Family Reading Program? Do you think it was beneficial? If so, in what ways was it beneficial? (Write your answer to this question on the back of this paper.)

Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills

Total Reading Scores

First Grade		Second Grade	
Participants	Non-participants	Participants	Non-participants
0.5	1.9	1.8	4.2
1.6	1.8	4.2	1.6
1.7	2.0	2.4	3.9
1.7	1.5	5.0	2.6
1.3	1.5	2.6	2.6
1.7	1.8	2.9	3.7
2.0	2.5	1.6	3.7
1.8	0.4	4.2	5.0
1.7	1.9	2.1	2.9
2.0	1.8	3.7	2.0
1.7	0.7	3.4	2.2
2.2	1.6	4.2	2.2
2.0	1.8	1.9	2.2
1.8	1.7	4.2	3.5
2.0	1.4	3.9	3.9
1.8	1.7	3.2	2.7
2.2	1.8	4.2	1.7
1.8	2.1	2.9	1.5
2.0	1.8	2.6	1.6
1.6	31.7	61.0	2.7
1.8	Average: 1.7	Average: 3.2	2.0
36.9			1.8
Average: 1.8			60.2
			Average: 2.7